



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Major General Thomas H. Katkus

Alaska National Guard takes sexual assault seriously

CAMP DENALI, Alaska— As commissioner for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and adjutant general for the Alaska National Guard, I am responsible for ensuring all personnel aggressively root out any harassment, hostile work environments, sexual assault, or trading of sexual favors. Unequivocally, these actions have no place in America's work environment. This responsibility to our military family and our state workforce is nonnegotiable.

When Governor Sean Parnell spoke at the Alaska Federation of Natives annual conference in Fairbanks last week, he clearly stated that respect is a traditional value that crosses all cultures. This is also true when it comes to the culture of the military. Choose Respect is not a slogan – it is a way of life for our military community, as it should be.

Every day, the thousands of men and women serving under my command take that mandate seriously. Yet, since 2009, 29 cases of alleged sexual assault have been reported to our sexual assault response coordinator by the Air and Army National Guard. Our leadership and investigating officers coordinated immediately with the Criminal Investigation Command and local law enforcement upon becoming aware that a crime may have been committed.

In 11 of the 29 cases, the victims chose to restrict reporting. Eighteen of those 29 cases had civilian perpetrators; 11 were military. Local law enforcement, including the Anchorage Police Department and the Alaska State Troopers, was contacted in 21 cases, and for reasons specific to each case, these law enforcement agencies closed or suspended each case.

As the leader of 4,500 people in my organization, I set three priorities for the workplace: recruiting and retention, standards, and safety. Sexual assault and sexual harassment directly undermine these critical pillars. Sexual assault and sexual harassment are shameful activities that are especially detrimental to our military, as they are inconsistent with our values, directly undermine our mission readiness, and erode trust and confidence.

The Alaska National Guard has made a deliberate effort to focus on prevention, victim support, investigations, and accountability. I strongly feel we can change a culture by engaging the entire organizational membership as part of the solution.

We have made great strides in educating our workforce about early intervention, demanding accountability at all levels, and continually improving responsive victim support. These are vital steps in combating sexual assault and fostering a culture of respect and dignity.

In educating our workforce, the Alaska National Guard instituted mandatory training blocks and yearly refresher courses to raise awareness of the problem, and provide our members with specific skills for intervention. This measure equips friends, peers, or colleagues to better protect potential victims. Commanders at all levels conduct command climate surveys and sensing sessions to provide every member of the organization the opportunity for anonymous or face-to-face feedback.

Demanding accountability requires the protection of the victim, while simultaneously affording the accused their rights, legal protections, and due process.

The National Guard Bureau has funded a full-time investigative position in Alaska to assist the command in cases where local law enforcement is unable to take action. When an allegation is substantiated, we take disciplinary action within the full measure of applicable policy, regulation, and law, regardless of rank, stature, or assignment.

Specific to improving responsiveness in support of the victim, the Alaska National Guard has a Joint Service Support staff of approximately 50 individuals who support 17 programs, including a sexual assault prevention and response coordinator, a military and family life consultant, director of psychological health, Military OneSource consultant, and family assistance centers. Beyond the Joint Service staff, we have an additional 40 fully-trained and accredited victim advocates.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is a proud and diverse institution, predominantly composed of the exceptionally professional women and men who wear our nation's military uniform. The Alaska National Guard is committed to protecting our men and women from sexual assault, and ensuring justice is served. We are focusing efforts on prevention, victim support, investigations, and accountability. Sexual assault and harassment are inconsistent with our values. When an allegation is substantiated, we deal with it within the full measure of applicable policy, regulation, and law.

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